

Dance Notes

FIRST SQUARE DANCE FESTIVAL

On October 28, the Prairie Farmers-WLS, in cooperation with the Chicago Park District and Square Dance Leaders of North America, sponsored their first annual Square Dance Festival, held at the Chicago Stadium. The occasion began with a three-hour meeting of the various leaders and representatives at the Eight Street Theatre. Various panels of four people, each changing every half hour, discussed diverse subjects pertaining to the Square Dance. For the most part this first meeting, was a waste of time. Not much was learned for the good of the whole. One thing, however, was definitely decided upon . . . "No National Organization". This decision was probably tempered by the recorded message from Lloyd "Pappy" Shaw who was absolute in his stand against such a federation. During the discussion period only two people, with no concrete argument in favor of such an organization, supported the organizing of a National Federation. Their expression was received with a weak applause given out of sheer courtesy. Those who were against the federation were short in their statements, and presented good arguments and received thunderous applause. Naturally, the suggestion was shelved until next year, until which time lobbying in its favor can be installed in full swing.

That evening, at the huge Chicago Stadium, to a "sold out" house, some 800 square dancers from 13 states, Metropolitan Chicago, the Federal District and Canada presented square after square after square, ad nauseam. Three times during the program all visiting square dancers were led into more square dancing in a mass presentation with all the 800 dancers crowding the wet, muddy and slippery area of the Chicago Stadium. Because everyone is clamoring to do Western square dancing, there was little originality, little variety and plenty of boring monotony. Kentucky, known for so many native dances and a rich folklore, also appeared with Western squares. Originality and regionalism was displayed only by the Hoosiers. As a result, Indiana State (Ten sets), stole the show and carried away all the laurels, if volume of applause is to be the means of judgement. The most polished presentation was that of the two sets from Washington, D. C. Chicago's popular Virginia Morrison had 8 sets that were unusual in the following respects: two sets were blind and partially blind dancers, two sets were composed of people recovering from polio, two sets were composed of the very old people (over the golden age) and some four sets of youngsters, all doing beautiful work, but the audience and the dancers were under the strain of fear, particularly for the handicapped, who had to work under the difficulties of a wet and extremely slippery floor.

A break in one way was the appearance of the Canadian group who did three numbers. Two were squares that barely differed from American square dancing, except done to French calling (and in it lie the unusualness and one dance that was a French-Canadian number). Students from Northwestern University, two sets plus a girl trio, presented a musical-comedy-like number bordering on buffoonery which left one wondering whether the number presented was in good faith or derogatory; either way, however, it was well presented. In fact, all groups did well, no complaint in that respect,

save for the fact that there was much too much of the same thing, over and over. What with regionalism being discouraged by the square dancers' avid desire to "organize and standardize", and ethnic folk dancing smugly frowned upon by this form of "neo-fascism" among them, then, beyond the "assembly line" of mass uniformity alone, remains nothing else.

Considering the distance many came from and the expense involved, the participants to my humble opinion, derived nothing out of the festival. The meeting and a badly managed rehearsal consumed most of the time. During the rehearsal a few elementary dances were taught. Otherwise, there was no general participation and hardly any opportunity to meet people and make friends. It was definitely a commercial undertaking. It would be wise for the Chicago Park District to divorce association from WLS when undertaking festivals of this nature.

INDIAN PROGRAM IN FAIRHOPE, ALA.

The Third Life students of Organic School, under the direction of their teacher, Miss Mary Offutt, invited parents and friends to enjoy their Indian Campfire Program.

The entire program was planned as an observance of the Indian rituals in honor of the corn plant and its importance in tribal life. Using handmade Indian drums the would-be Indians called their friends together, demonstrated the hand and stick games that accompany the gathering of firewood, then invited everyone to enjoy the campfire cookery. With the help of some generous parents the entire crowd was well fed.

Adapting the Pawnee ritual dances and songs to their special talents and ages the youngsters, dressed in Indian costumes, gave a delighted audience an indication of the veneration in which corn is held by all American Indians.

A recital of Hiawatha's fasting and subsequent reward opened the program, then the Corn Dances and the delicate little song "Fourfold Deep Lie My Roots" introduced the Planting Ritual.

A Zuni legend of the Corn Maidens followed the song "Light our Hearts and Gay" and the Omaha tribal prayer. Finally the ceremonies of harvesting and gridding the corn, each with appropriate songs, led to the finale, the offering of the corn to the Corn Gods and the lovely march, around the campfire "Follow Mother Corn."

The simplicity of the project, the fervor of the children and the appropriateness of the songs and dances made this a memorable program. It is to be hoped that the entire pageant can be repeated for the enjoyment of a much larger public.

DEVI DJA JAVA CONCERT

Hands, hands, hands. Lovely hands, Charming hands, enchanting hands. Such would be the overall picture of the Javanese dance recital presented by the famous Devi Dja and ensemble consisting of one additional female dancer, Alyna, and two youths, Ali and Kalu, plus two musicians who played the Gamelans: Emas Enwok and Wang Djapar.

In our part of the world, when it comes to Bali-Java dances we have seen no other to surpass her. All numbers presented were exquisit, but some need special mention. The "Temptation of Buddha" was spellbindingly bewitching. "Djarang Kepang", a comic hobby horse pantomime with Alyna, Ali and Kalu, was mirthful in

its story, realistic in its equisiterian movement and it was a number one would have loved to see over and over. "Rondeng", a flirtatious dance from Malaya (Alyna and Kalu) was vivacious and interest provoking. The Papuan Jungle Dance "Chaka Lele" by Ali and Kalu, was not only unique in these parts of the world, but of excellent execution. The Harvest Dance from Borneo (Alyna and Kalu) acquainted the wide-eyed-with-interest audience with the phase of agriculture rituals of a remote corner of the world. Of extreme interest to everyone present was the number "Buayan", a cradle song from Padang, which the entire ensemble portrayed. It showed a home scene and the various activities going on; meanwhile, one rocked the cradle and all sang while going about their chores. The song and melody was pleasing even to Western ears. They sang it naturally and without any embellishments and the audience was transferred to the mood of the peace of home and a blessed harmony in the household. "Ketjak", a "voodoo" type of a dance through which animal spirits are believed to be slain, was eerie and haunting and one almost imagined "bedlam" on the loose. There were sixteen numbers in all, representing various Indonesian regions and danced in their proper regional costumes which was like a style show plus top entertainment and a lesson in anthropology thrown together. A great performance, indeed.

END OF SZURET AMONG MAGYARS

October is a festive month among the Hungarians the world over, whether they live in Budapest, Mezokovesz, Buffalo, Detroit or Chicago. Somewhere grapes were harvested, so the Magyars make merry and they do it in a big way, as only Magyars know how.

There were several celebrations in Chicago, the one I attended was in the vicinity of the Parish of Our Lady of Hungary (Burnside—Chicago). The doors were scheduled to open at 7:00 P. M. but the entire audience was there by six (and perhaps earlier). By seven who ever planned to be there was there and the hall was packed with celebrants. The ceiling was decorated with fall leaves and flowers. Clusters of grapes and fruits of every type hung from all over the ceiling above the dancers. During the evening repeated programs of Hungarian dances were presented by a handsomely clad group of young Magyars. The girls wore their national costumes of accordian pleated skirts while the boys, their spurred boots, tight trousers of black, black vests, feathered hats and richly embroidered butterfly type sleeves, which, in all, made a very beautiful picture as they danced their routines csardases with the elan that marks Hungarian dancing. When their presentations were completed, the orchestra played csardases and the audience danced; while dancing, they "tried" to "steal" any of the fruits hanging from the ceiling, but too many "eagle eyed" spotters were planted all over, and the "thieves", as to be expected, were caught, and were taken to the "Biro" (judge) to pay the fine. Crime doesn't pay, as they often paid a dollar or more for one "steal". Nevertheless, by 8:30, the fruit was practically all gone.

The impression to eye and ear, made by the sight of so many costumes worn by the people in general (not the dancers only), even little children, one and two year toddlers, looking like dolls, wore costumes, was wonderful. Dancers, (general audience), sing the haunting Magyar tunes while doing their ballroom csardas. It was thrilling, and then, realization made it sad to think that

perhaps within a half century all of these customs will disappear, assimilation will set in and the beautiful old world customs will be replaced with the drab Anglo-Saxon void. At present we still are a rich nation of nations, unique in the world, and rich in cultures. For how long? Dievas Zino (Only God knows).

CHICAGO DANCE COUNCIL

The Chicago Dance Council opened its 15th year with an interesting program on October 22nd at Thorne Hall. The program consisted of folk, character and ballet numbers. The folk dances were beautifully presented by the Norwegian Leikaringen Heimhug. The audience was delighted with their presentations of Fire Tour, Spring, Gamal Rheinlander, Tre Karls Polska and one of the prettiest Rheinlander for Three.

The Noel-Clavajo School of Dance sent down a group of girls who presented one number dressed as cow boys and another, a Bamboca (mis-named "Spanish Dance") composed of numerous wiggles as they imagined the Afro-Cubans, Haitians and Brazilians would do.

Haile Fox appeared in a very long routine dance of Hassidic vein which she named "The World My Father Knew". The music was composed of Hassidic, Israeli, Heria and Zmirot melodies, plus recitation by Miss Fox. On a whole the number was characteristic of the Hassidic dance forms, the Miss Fox, just as she conglomerated all types of melodies she did likewise with all types of steps; a little ballet, a bit modern, some Kazatski and some acrobatics. Otherwise she has warm feeling and an understanding for this type of dance. We hope she continues working at it.

The Bentley Stone—Walter Camryn School of Ballet sent a group of capable young people who presented a series of numbers. Joan Ehman had all the beauty of movement ballet requires. Donna Roknick was cute in her interpretation of a country dance. John Sharpe truly excelled in his number "It Ain't Necessarily So"; he is quite talented. Elissa Queyquip and Billy Reilly kept a flawless timing in their Hora Staccato, an interpretation with a remote insinuation of something Romanian about it.

Refreshments and tete-a-tete, as is the custom with the Chicago Dance Council meetings, closed the pleasant afternoon.

NORDIC COMPETITION

On October 14th, Chicago's Svenskies and Norskies (plus some Dansk representatives and a delegation from Minneapolis led by Peter Olson), met at the Swedish Svitoid Hall. During the evening the folk dancers of the two national groups presented numbers for judgement. Mr. and Mrs. Paul Dunsing, Grace Peterson and Vyts Belaius were the judges. A decision in this case was almost impossible, since both are excellent groups and neither did the same dances. The final decision, with only a difference of nine points, was given in the favor of the Swedes. Personally, we are against competition of this nature. It is different if unrelated couples would be judged as best dancers in waltz, polka, hambo, etc.

The Swedes (alternating with the Norwegians) presented Fryksdalopolska, Fjällopsk and Väva Vadmal, all multi-figure routine dances where there was a great deal of floor pattern and required facial expression. The Norwegians presented the Gamal Rheinlander, Og Kjore Ved (a singing dance) and Springer (Jump) dance. In difficulty their dances did not compare with